



PTILOTIS ORNATUS: Gould

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PTILOTIS ORNATUS, *Gould.*

Graceful Ptilotis.

Ptilotis ornatus, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part VI., 1838, p. 24.—Ibid, Syn. Birds of Australia, Part IV.

THE first notice of this species of Honey-eater may be found in the "Proceedings of the Zoological Society for 1838," as quoted above. The specimen there characterized was the only one I had then seen, and formed part of the fine collection of Fort Pitt at Chatham. It was received from Western Australia, where the species appears to be plentiful, being common at Swan River, and in all probability over the whole of the present unknown country between that place and the River Murray in South Australia, as I found it inhabiting the extensive belts of dwarf *Eucalypti* and other singular shrub-like trees which border the lower part of that river, and this may possibly be the extreme limit of its range in that direction. It was a source of much gratification to myself to have unexpectedly found this elegant little bird in the rich arboretum, which had already supplied me with so many novelties, both animal and vegetable: among the latter I found the plant figured in the accompanying Plate (*Pittosporum salicifolium*, R. Brown), not as one to which the bird gives preference, but upon which it was occasionally seen; the *Eucalypti* being the trees to which the birds of this genus more especially resort, among whose thick leafy branches and blossoms they may at all times be observed actively engaged in searching for insects, upon which, and the pollen and saccharine juices of the flowers, they almost solely subsist. In the Belts of the Murray it was confined to trees of a dwarf growth, while in the country in the neighbourhood of Swan River I am informed it is seen on the topmost branches of the gum- and mahogany-trees, clinging and flitting about the blossoms, not unfrequently descending to the ground, and hopping about beneath the branches and near the boles of the larger trees, doubtless in search of insects.

It has rather a loud ringing and not unpleasing song, which is constantly poured forth.

The nest is generally suspended from a horizontal forked branch, frequently in an exposed situation, and is of a neat, small, open, cup-shaped form, composed of fine vegetable fibres and grasses matted together with spiders' webs, and sometimes wool. The eggs are either two or three in number, of a deep salmon colour, becoming paler at the smaller end and minutely freckled with reddish brown, particularly at the larger end; they are nine lines long by seven broad.

The female differs from the male in being somewhat less in size, and those I collected had the nostrils, eyelash and basal portion of the bill orange instead of black, as in the male; still I am not fully satisfied that this orange colouring may not indicate immaturity, and that the fully adult female may not have these, as in her mate.

Crown of the head, external edge of the wings, rump and tail-feathers olive; back olive-brown; all the under surface greyish white, each feather having a longitudinal mark of brown down the centre; under tail-coverts lighter; on each side of the neck a lengthened tuft of rich yellow feathers; eye black, surrounded in the male by a narrow black eyelash except for a third of the space, behind which is yellow; feet purplish brown; bill black.

The figures are of the natural size.